



## Strategies for maintaining small businesses in the entertainment and hospitality sectors, Abidjan, Ivory coast

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### Abstract

Events that cause disruption, like the COVID-19 pandemic, affect the entertainment and lodging industries by interfering with client behavior and operational processes. When they are unable to operate during interruptions, small enterprise owners in the entertainment and hospitality sectors run the danger of losing money and going out of business. This qualitative study, which was informed by the blue ocean hypothesis, sought to understand the methods employed by small-business proprietors in the hospitality and entertainment industries to maintain how they operated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The people who took part were seven entertainment and hospitality small company owners from Abidjan, Ivory Coast who ran profitable operations both before and throughout the COVID-19 outbreak in May 2019. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather the data. The face-to-face data-gathering process took 20 to 30 minutes. From the thematic analysis, two themes—communication and customer service—rose. Business owners are advised to save expenses, ensure customer satisfaction, and maintain open lines of communication about their operations, goods, and services. The ability of small company owners in the entertainment and hospitality industries to maintain their operations is one aspect of the implications for social improvement. With enduring enterprises, the neighborhood may gain from more employment prospects, better revenue generation, and more tax receipts.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, communication, customer service, hospitality, and entertainment

### Introduction

The impact of COVID-19 on firm survival as well as achievement. Small owners of companies in the entertainment and hospitality industries are responsible for spotting economic hazards and instabilities that have monetary effects on the neighborhood and the company. Business owners who are successful employ techniques that lessen the negative effects of a protracted crisis (Khanchel, I., *et al.*, 2023) <sup>[20]</sup>. A Research by Abuhussein, T., *et al.*, (2023) <sup>[1]</sup>, which evaluated the influence of COVID-19 on the leisure and tourist sector, recommended that owners of businesses plan and put recovery strategies into place in order to maintain their marketability and competitiveness. In order to sustain resilience within an organization, proprietors must also be aware of internal processes as well as external surroundings like crises, interruptions, and calamities (Bell, 2019) <sup>[6]</sup>. Minor owners of companies in the entertainment and hospitality industries can guarantee the dependability of internal business operations to withstand difficulties, situations of crisis, or tragedies by preserving the resilience of their organization.

A strategy is a blueprint for how company owners or executives can outperform competitors by anticipating possibilities, developing distinctive value, and having a plan for operations (Clausing, K. A., & Sarin, N. 2023) <sup>[10]</sup>. According to Azaddin (2020) and Savara (A. M. 1989) <sup>[39]</sup>, policy is a set of guidelines for making corporate decisions centered around cohesion, advantages in competitiveness, improvement, industry magnitude, and services and products. In designing a strategy to be competitive in the market, Mustaffa, N. K., *et al.*, (2021) <sup>[33]</sup> found an inconsistency between the two areas of management and investigated the causes and benefits of business owners

diversifying. By lowering prices, enhancing products, broadening their product offerings, and providing superior service to customers, small firms can obtain and keep their competitive edge (Setyanti, S. W. L. H. 2023) <sup>[40]</sup>. To retain earnings, improvements in the quality of services and remedies are required (Sotnyk, I., *et al.*, 2023) <sup>[42]</sup>. A customer's perception of a good or service may depend on its sales price, promised delivery date, and degree of service (Florea, N. V., *et al.*, 2022) <sup>[12]</sup>.

The absence of interactions between the vendor and the client has also been recognized by Plekhanova, V. (2020) <sup>[35]</sup> as having an effect on sales and profitability. Business owners can better comprehend and meet client wants when there is a shared appreciation between them and their vendors (Butenko, E. D., *et al.*, 2021) <sup>[7]</sup>. By making investments in client relations and solutions, businesses can better understand their clients' demands, keep them as clients, and increase revenue. In order to sustain a comparable border, penetrate underserved markets, raise customer demand while sustaining an accurate supply mechanism, capitalize on potential, separate and branch out services and goods, establish and execute marketing plans, improve the use of assets and skills, and carry out overall strategic plans, entrepreneurs who succeed develop and employ approaches.

Entrepreneurs with small enterprises have been found to lead to creative ventures, the development of novel services and goods, and the creation of jobs, according to Riana, R., & Syamsuri, A. R. (2022) <sup>[36]</sup>.

Managers and customers need to comprehend each other in order to build socioeconomic cohesiveness because of both the social and economic effect factors. In order to increase corporate efficiency while also enhancing the social and

financial circumstances of the surrounding area, profitable entrepreneurs ensure the development of common goals (Annamalah, S., *et al.*, 2023) <sup>[3]</sup>. Entrepreneurs who are seeking efficiency and environmentally friendly habits may have an impact on performance measurements, according to Uzhegova, M., & Torkkeli, L. (2023) <sup>[47]</sup>. Finance, superiority, creativity, external factors, and social achievements are among the performance variables (Fosu, E., Yi, & Asiedu 2023) <sup>[13]</sup>. Because relying solely on economic sustainability has a negative influence on both the environment and society, business leaders who prioritize achieving and sustaining ethical behavior ensure that both corporate objectives and social demands are addressed (Zhao, W. X., *et al.*, 2023) <sup>[47]</sup>.

Hence, in order to meet social demands, prosperous business operators develop, maintain, and enhance personal connections with clients (Tajpour, M., *et al.*, 2023) <sup>[45]</sup>. According to Solaiman, I., *et al.* (2023) <sup>[41]</sup>, owners of companies who prioritize contributing to society must constantly express their stance and policies. Importantly, the market activities of entrepreneurs with smaller enterprises spur value creation and raise consumer happiness by raising competition and introducing new client requirements. Business owners, according to Rapoport, N. B., and Tianio Jr. (2018) <sup>[37]</sup>, can encourage social transformation by inventing goods and services tailored to consumer requirements.

Small enterprises can be easily incorporated into the nearby commercial network, resulting in the growth of the local area and more jobs. By generating jobs and increased revenue for their local populations, successful proprietors of businesses promote good social transformation (Maspul, K. A., & Almalki, F. A. 2023) <sup>[31]</sup>. A community's higher buying power is determined by its increased income, which influences its financial status (Audi, M., & Ali, A. 2023) <sup>[4]</sup>. Lazonic, W. (2017) <sup>[26]</sup> proposed that proprietors of small businesses produce middle-class wage earners that support the preservation and distribution of financial wealth. Quality innovation is the responsibility of business owners, but community members' incomes also matter. Makona, A., *et al.* (2023) <sup>[29]</sup> discovered that because buyers have different opinions and perceptions of pleasure, entrepreneurs should take their income into account while creating new value. The proprietor of the business uses the method of decision-making to determine how to grow and gratify clients across the income range after gathering data from the conflicting viewpoints of clients. Along with the positive effects of financial stability on innovation, residents with stable incomes support local enterprises by ensuring their viability and competitiveness (Ahlstrom, D. 2010) <sup>[2]</sup>. Even though a company's primary goal is to earn the most income, strategies that support humanitarian innovation and entrepreneurship are crucial for tackling societal concerns and obstacles, enhancing capacity, and ensuring sustainability (Mahardhani, A. J. (2023) <sup>[28]</sup>. Entrepreneurs with small enterprises may put ideas into action to help people economically and socially by recognizing their financial and social achievements.

The blue ocean theory by Kim and Mauborgne (2023) <sup>[22]</sup> was chosen as the theoretical foundation for the current research as business leaders can utilize four analytical tools to decrease costs and raise customer value, which will result in innovative value creation. Someone with a company can utilize the planning sheet as a structure to comprehend how

the market functions. Additionally, it displayed the variables and associated offering levels following the use of blue ocean tactics. A proprietor of a company who has an in-depth comprehension of the market is capable of removing unneeded features from the qualities of items and offerings, lowering costs, and passing the savings on to clients by providing goods and services at competitive prices (Kir, A. 2023) <sup>[23]</sup>. An organization owner may try distinction alongside cost reductions by improving or adding particular features to services and goods (Lilavanichakul, A., & Yoksan, R. 2023) <sup>[27]</sup>. As a result, making sure the elements are competitive and worth investing in enables business leaders to cut expenses and reward innovation.

A novel idea becomes an innovative product, interpretation, or company strategy through innovation (Chapter I. I., NS). Owners of enterprises must prioritize innovation if they want to succeed in a cutthroat market (Hanafiah, M. H., *et al.*, 2023) <sup>[15]</sup>. According to Kim, W. C., and Mauborgne, R. (2014) <sup>[21]</sup>, the sustainability of businesses is supported by strategic actions that identify and exploit blue oceans. When firm owners comprehend the pattern of developing and catching the blue oceans, superior results can be attained (Chan & Mauborgne, 2005b). By providing goods and services dependable, cost-effective, and simple to use, owners of businesses can deliberately increase their share of the market. Market share is impacted by client base, which is impacted by loyalty. Owners of businesses must emphasize transitioning services or goods and ease of use to ensure consumer loyalty. Entrepreneurs who want to stand out from their rivals and attract clients must modify their operations adopting the same strategy. The Blue Ocean idea was utilized by entrepreneurs and owners of established companies to determine an appropriate price curve for their organizations. In the latest study examining how small company owners perceived the market's competitiveness and how individuals expanded their businesses.

Working together, dialog, and invention are made possible by a well-constructed info and telecommunication technology infrastructure (Suryawan, I. W. K., & Lee, C. H. 2023) <sup>[43]</sup>. Novel technologies must produce innovative products and services for consumers because it is insufficient to create a "blue ocean" on its own.

### Statement of the Problem

Despite the fact that hospitality and entertainment small company owners engage a large number of people in the neighborhood, employment fell more quickly during prolonged crises than in other sectors (Palagina, M. 2021) <sup>[34]</sup>. Palagina, M. (2021) <sup>[34]</sup> discovered that, in contrast to other sectors, the entertainment and hospitality sector was more impacted by catastrophic circumstances. According to research For instance, entertainment, and hospitality saw a greater than-average fall in hiring amid the COVID-19 pandemic, as demonstrated by a 50% drop in job posts between the two months of 2020 (Fairlie, R. W. (2020) <sup>[11]</sup>. It was clear that the entertainment and hospitality companies were among the first to be impacted by the pandemic due to the sudden closure of lodging facilities and flight bans throughout the outbreak. The particular concern is that a few entrepreneurs in the tourism and lodging sectors lacked the resilience and survival measures necessary to maintain their operations as the COVID-19 pandemic got underway in May 2020. As a result, the researchers decided to conduct this study in order to shed some light and make recommendations for strengthening the department's contingency plans.

## Research Question

There is one main research question from which two sub-research questions were developed to guide this study. These research questions were answered at the end of the research.

**Main R.Q.** What tactics did small business entrepreneurs in the hotel and leisure sectors employ to maintain their operations throughout the COVID-19 pandemic?

**R.Q.i:** What tactics did small business entrepreneurs in the hotel and leisure sectors employ to maintain their operations throughout the COVID-19 pandemic looking at the domain of communication?

**R.Q.ii:** What tactics did small business entrepreneurs in the hotel and leisure sectors employ to maintain their activities throughout the COVID-19 pandemic considering the sector of customer Services?

## The Aim

The main goal of this work was to investigate the business survival tactics utilized by small entertainment and hospitality entrepreneurs beginning in May 2020 after the pandemic. For ease of understanding of the research work, the research developed two sub-aims from the main aim as follows:

**Sub aim one:** The first sub-aim of this research was to investigate the business survival tactics utilized by entertainment and hospitality entrepreneurs beginning in May 2020 after the pandemic in the domain of communication.

**Sub aim two:** The second sub-aim goal of this work was to investigate the business survival tactics utilized by small entertainment and hospitality entrepreneurs beginning in May 2020 after the pandemic in the sector of customer services.

## Methodology

The qualitative technique is used by researchers to gather and examine a variety of information, as well as utilized to investigate limited occurrences (Kohler *et al.*, 2022). The qualitative technique can be used to study company leadership in a variety of contexts because of its versatility, adaptability, and application (Balachandran, 2021) <sup>[5]</sup>. A qualitative approach was suited for this work since the respondents discussed their perspectives and sustainability-related experiences and methods employed by their firms. To analyze the link between the parameter and variables that predict, the researchers instead produced numerical data based on statistics using the quantitative technique (Saunders *et al.*, 2015). By expressing their experiences or points of view, respondents in qualitative investigations were able to be identified and their subjective interpretations of phenomena explored (Swords *et al.*, 2021) <sup>[44]</sup>.

## Population and Sampling

The researchers gathered information from seven proprietors of entertainment and hospitality firms who ran their operations prior to, throughout, and during the peak of the COVID-19 outbreak in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. In accordance with their business background, those who took part were chosen from among the owners of these

companies. To obtain rich and comprehensive data, researchers carefully profile people and use intentional sampling (Hjertstrand *et al.*, 2021) <sup>[17]</sup>.

## Data Collection Instruments

Semi-structured interviews are used by researchers to let the dialogue flow naturally and let the person being interviewed offer a narrative about a particular subject (Hanson *et al.*, 2017) <sup>[16]</sup>. In order to facilitate conversation and acquire insight, the researchers performed both in-person and phone interviews with the use of comparable semi-structured questions on each participant. In order to encourage interaction and contact with those who responded and to collect useful data that would help to ensure reliability, the researchers deliberately planned and communicated with them about the study.

## Data Analysis

A crucial step in the research approach is data analysis. Researchers utilize data analysis to condense and present data, enabling interpretation and verification (Mattimoe *et al.*, 2021) <sup>[32]</sup>. Data analysis techniques used by qualitative researchers include material, narrative, conversations, thematic, empirical theory, and interpretative phenomenology. To encapsulate, categorize, contrast, and quantitatively express data, researchers employ content analysis (Kilic, 2022). To find patterns, resemblances, and themes, investigators employ thematic analysis (Robinson, 2022) <sup>[38]</sup>.

## Findings

The findings were presented respecting the sub-research questions as follows.

### 1. Communication

The most important theme to emerge from these conversations was communication. While (I.4) informed their clients about special offers on particular products, (I.1), (I.2), and (I.5) stated communicating pricing changes for their goods. During the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone who took part kept in touch with clients and vendors regarding their business activities while emphasizing safety measures. Communication was noted in (I.3) as a factor that enables business owners to look after staff members who support and endorse the business ambitions. (I.3) stressed that by staying organized in designated units and tasks and communicating modifications to their health, communication helped the personnel maintain their well-being. (I.2) guaranteed communication by using direct dialogue and indicators to take care of some of the issues relating to some customers' safety failure to comply.

It was proposed that communication aids in managerial or business owners' efforts to inform stakeholders of the positive effects and advantages of modifying the process. Due to the necessity for change that it introduced to businesses, staff members, vendors, and consumers, communication was crucial throughout the COVID-19 epidemic. When examining ways for maintaining profitability, researchers discovered that regular, efficient communication assists entrepreneurs and staff members in meeting consumer needs and enables customers to constantly benefit from the goods and services on supply. Participants kept in touch with their clients, staff, and providers during the COVID-19 epidemic in order to

maintain their company's activities. In a study to look at the connections between communication and effectiveness, Jou, Y. T., Saflor, *et al.* (2022) [19] suggested that business proprietors as well as employees deliver high-quality data in order to increase client happiness and the success of the company.

## 2. Customer Service

The second and most crucial concept that has come to light is from these conversations was customer service. Although resources are important for keeping businesses operating, (I.2) emphasized the value of customer service provided by committed staff to help remedy the obstacles or issues managers face. Effective customer service enabled staff to provide clients with the goods or services they requested, according to (I.1) and (I.4). Additionally, (I.3) indicated that recurring business was up due to better customer service provided after each visit. Monitoring and addressing the shifting demands of the consumer was crucial to good customer service. Customer service was linked to the philosophical structure by Pham *et al.* (2022), who looked at customer collaboration behaviors. Interaction with customers contributes to shaping the client experience and facilitates value development.

The new and older literature also supports effective customer service in organizations. Anwer *et al.* (2020) studied corporate acquisition choices. Workers and the company as a whole must share the same values for dedicated workers to deliver the appropriate customer service and boost performance. Likewise, business management and employees will be aware of how they can present items and services to increase sales by taking into account the value of the consumer or consumer in decision-making (Anwer *et al.*, 2020). According to Yaacob (2013), a service that prioritizes clients, commencing with preparing, creating, and customer service, helps increase value and save costs since it can be utilized to use consumer feedback to improve goods and services and cut inefficiency.

## Recommendation

To keep and draw in consumers, the experts advise staff to deliver great customer service. To be successful, owners of companies, leaders, and staff must make an investment in providing excellent customer service. With the goal to better serve clients, managers and owners of businesses may use the gaps identified by customer questions or complaints to establish a foundation for their staff (You *et al.*, 2020). Staff may improve service quality by better understanding what clients want. Additionally, providing excellent customer service aids entrepreneurs in keeping a competitive edge (Galpin, 2019).

Researchers are able to assist owners of companies in improving business processes by using a qualitative method in a different sector. There were just 7 businesses involved in this work. Future researchers may think about enlarging the study's scope and boosting the sample size in order to replicate its findings and assure their generalizability. Respondent accessibility and potential prejudice were further restrictions.

## Conclusion

Company collapse might result from a lack of sustainability and resilience tactics to support small enterprises after an occurrence that disrupts them. Small entrepreneurs

operating in the entertainment and hospitality industries may gain from using effective sustainability techniques to boost financial growth, income equality, and job creation. The study's conclusions showed how entrepreneurs in the entertainment and hospitality industries may maintain their viability and resilience in the face of a catastrophic occurrence by putting these ideas into practice.

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